1: Dieterlen--1 E-5 (1946-1949) 1951 FA8 Bambara FA8

/xi/ Foreword

114 The present work is part of a series of studies undertaken in French Sudan since 1931 by the Griaule Missions.

In the course of the sixth, seventh, and eighth expeditions (1946, 1948, 1949) the research dealt with the religious institutions of the Bambara. In this essay we have presented, with the necessary comments, the results of the inquiries conducted by the author, while taking into consideration the work of her teammates.

The information was gathered in the region of Bamako at Koulikoro, Kayo, and Kangaba; in the circle of Ségou at Konodimini, Banankoroni, Diammarabougou, Soroba, Massala, Toko, Shouola, Kokou Banankoro, Pelengena, Sama, Kala, Kalabougou, Ségoubougou, and Ségoukoura; and in the various quarters of the capital city. /Bamako/.

Some elements of the material described were gathered for the Institut Français d'Afrique Noire of Dakar.

115 The Bambara who collaborated regularly in the gathering of information are the following.

Dyodo Diallo, son of Zangué Diallo, notable of Ségou.
Mamadou Diara, director of the rural school of Bamako.
Bala Diara, of Banankoroni, farmer, hunter, diviner, chief of the Komo, chief of the Kworé.
Dji Diara, of Soroba, farmer, hunter, healer, chief of the Nama.
Bakonimba Koulibali, of Soroba, farmer, chief of the Komo.
Boï Koulibali, teacher at Konodimini.
Mousa Woulalé, of Pelengena, griot. /minstrel and herald/
Mousa Diara, of Sama, farmer.
Nadyè Dambèlè, of Konodimini, potter.

000 Numerous chiefs, notables, priests, and generally speaking, all those who were sources of interesting information were consulted. We thank them for their collaboration.

We also thank the Governor of the Sudan and the Administrators of the circles of Bamako, Ségou, and Mopti, /xii/ the Director of the Institut Français d'Afrique Noire for the facilities they have provided us.

This study was conducted under the direction of Mr. Marcel Griaule whom we thank for his help in the field and for his advice concerning the presentation of the material. We also thank Mrs. de Ganay who has collected some of this material.

177 substratum on which each tribe has grafted its original system. The
121 study of this substratum would help define the problem of origins and influences.

After this, we have at our disposal the support of philology and above all the advantage of seeing the Bambara live their beliefs and of discovering their myths in a crude but expressive material as well as in numerous rites. The observations made over a wide field of inquiry serve as the basis for the presentation of this religious system.

● 114 The Bambara have been for a long time the subject of articles and
121 works, of which we will give below a concise bibliography. The only author who, until now, has attempted to describe their beliefs as a system is L. Tauxier whose study of La Religion Bambara /Bambara religion/ takes into account to a large extent the works of the Abbé Henry and Ch. Monteil. However, through the descriptions of these different observers which are certainly conscientious, this religion appears as a composite of diverse and even inconsistent elements with no apparent link between them. Despite a uniform plan and a laudable absence of preconceived ideas, L. Tauxier has been unable to bring out the fundamental concepts of the people he observed.

In fact, the study of a present-day Negro religion runs into difficulties of various kinds stemming on the one hand from the necessity of going into the field and on the other hand from the largely esoteric character of the doctrine. These circumstances make this study essentially a work of discovery.

Indeed, Bambara religion, like all Sudanese religions, has an exoteric part, quite easily accessible, which observation conducted along scientific lines may reveal in detail. Rules of life admitted by all, beliefs openly professed, and public or private practices may be the object of detailed work. But this religion, like that of the neighboring peoples, rests upon a doctrine whose fundamental principles
[609] are known to elders and initiates who show considerable aversion to confiding in strangers, particularly whites. Such a situation explains the ignorance in which scholarship has remained for so long concerning the religious way of thinking of this people (1).

812 1. The Bambara themselves distinguish between two kinds of knowledge. The first, called doni fyɛ̃ma "knowledge (which has) wind" /xviii/ is superficial

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and considered to be "the introduction to beliefs and customs." It belongs to adults who know little of cosmology. On the contrary, the second, called "deep knowledge" (doniya duna or kuru doniya), is restricted to priests, heads of families, elders of both sexes who are versed in "the science of the things of creation." It can only be acquired slowly in the course of successive initiations and through actual instruction which is sometimes diffused during the rites.

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/xviii/ A rigorous method of observation which neglects no detail and which involves the use of close collaboration from the natives has brought forth a system coherent in all its parts and, it may be said, based on a metaphysics hitherto unknown. Taking the Bambara postulates as a point of departure, the sequence of events through the myths, the development of institutions and technology, their operation and the actual destiny of man in the cosmos all unfold in a logical framework.

On the other hand, this system is projected into the concrete in the form of symbols which borrow the most diversified aspects and which play an active role. The symbolism not only penetrates religious life proper by appearing in the sanctuaries, in the cult materials (shapes and sign writing), or during religious ceremonies (times and places, rituals, etc.), but is present in every aspect of secular life and daily behavior.

The metaphysics and the religion of this people offer a structural entity which includes all social, technological, and economic activities. In the following chapters, we shall attempt to clarify these principles and this system. We believe we may safely state that certain inconsistencies or contradictions presented by the religious system as it is described here are not due to Bambara thought—even though it is subtle and based on a dialectic—but to lacunae in the investigation.

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[534] both the waters that flowed over the earth in the past and those that will spread over the world when Faro orders them (Fig. 4).

While awaiting that day, Faro continues his work. Taking the spiral route originally followed at the time of the reorganization of the world, every four centuries he travels about, inspecting the confines of the world, and then returns to the central point whence he surveys and governs the universe.

Chapter 2

The Representations

776 /34/ The duality of glã, in the microcosm that is man by his twin souls (ni and dya), is projected into the universe in the form of the pair, sky-earth, originally formed by the splitting of the spirit in two. The pair is represented by two supernatural powers, Faro and Pemba, to whom the principal Bambara cults are addressed.

Pemba is both spirit, strength, and matter. He is actually represented by an engraved piece of wood, symbol of plank originally responsible for the creation of all living things on earth. Theoretically, each family has one.

Faro, master of the word, reigns both in the sky and in the waters, which are the earthly reflection of the sky. In his capacity as master of the word and reorganizer of the universe, custodian of life, and guardian of souls, Faro, light and vibration, reigns in the seventh heaven. As master of the waters, he is described by the Bambara as a living being who has a body and is subject to metamorphosis. Yet to the initiated, he remains first and foremost a higher spirit, detached from contingencies and free in the exercise of the sovereign power conferred on him.

In order to understand fully the spirit of the Bambara religion, it is necessary to examine all the representations of these powers (1).

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114 1. A few authors have summarily described Faro, in particular, L. Tauxier in Religion bambara (pp. 142-145), in

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which he quotes Msgr. Bazin and the Abbé Henry. These authors have not disclosed the fundamental role of this power nor the area he covers.

It would be proper to compare here these representations with those observed by the Griaule missions in the Sudan such as the Nommo of the Dogon, the Domfé of the Kouroumba, and Faro or Yégou of the Bozo, and published in the following books and articles:

M. Griaule, Masques Dogon /Dogon Masks/; "Le Domfé des Kouroumba /The Domfé of Kouroumba/," Journal de la Société des Africanistes, Vol. II (1941), pp. 7-20. D. Paulme, Organisation sociale des Dogon /Social Organization of the Dogon/. S. de Ganay, Les Devises des Dogon /Dogon Device/; Le Binou Yébéné /The Yébéné Binou/. G. Dieterlen, Les Ames des Dogon; "Notes sur le Génie des Eaux chez les Bozo /Notes on the Water Spirit of the Bozo/," Journal de la Société des Africanistes, Vol. 12 (1942), pp. 149-155. G. Dieterlen and S. de Ganay, Le Génie des Eaux chez des Dogon /The Water Spirit among the Dogon/. M. Griaule, Dieu d'eau. Mrs. B. Appia has also published interesting observations in "Note sur le Génie des Eaux en Guinée /Note on the Water Spirit in Guinea/," Journal de la Société des Africanistes, Vol. 14 (1944), pp. 33-42.

/35/ Pemba

776 Pemba, born of primordial vibration, was originally a "globule," kuru, which whirled around to create the earth. While he was a whirlwind, a molecule broke off and became a seed, which fell onto the earth, sprouted and became the Acacia albida. The latter grew,

Spiritual Principles (1)

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1. A few comments on the spiritual principles of the Bambara (in particular on the dya and the nyama) have been collected in the chapter entitled "Théorie des âmes" by Tauxier, La Religion bambara (pp. 14-25), in which the author appraises the works of the Abbé Henry and of Ch. Monteil. Some of the observations made in the following chapter have been summarized by the author in "La Personne chez les Bambara" and in "Note sur le tere chez les Bambara /Note on the Tere among the Bambara/."

It will be useful to compare this study of spiritual principles with the studies made among the Dogon and presented respectively by M. Griaule, S. de Ganay, and the author in Masques Dogon, Les Devises des Dogon, and Les Âmes des Dogon.

761 776 The Soul, ni, and the Double, dya:

[826] Faro controls the principle of life in water, which is his realm as well as the life-giving element par excellence. In the bodies of living beings, this principle has its seat in the blood. The blood of the sacrifices offered to the spirit (or failing that, the juice of the tomato, a transformation of blood) is a contribution to the reservoir of life controlled by Faro—life which he redistributes in all its forms throughout the universe. Water is the privileged element in which life may persevere indefinitely. Elsewhere, life is maintained only if water comes to nourish it.

761 776 842 833 Faro's creative function is materialized by each marital partner eating a tomato before sexual relations. This act is accompanied by the recital of a prayer. The juice of the fruit, which contains the body of the future child, transmits life according to the following mechanism:

761 776 842 824 Faro receives the offerings of tomatoes grown ritually in the consecrated fields, as well as the blood of victims slain in his name above the waters. Blood and juice, spreading over water, the fertilizing agent, are collected by the swallow, Faro's airborne messenger. Liberated in space, they return to the soil with fertilizing rain and penetrate the tomato seeds which thus contain a particle of generative power.

*173 These, in brief, are the difficulties encountered in dealing
814 with sources for native historical tradition. When Islam
817 introduced [25] a written language, there was created a new
212 category of archivists, the marabouts. They have added this duty to many others; it cannot be proved that they have purged the job of its former vices, but it may be stated categorically that they have added a few new ones.

It is notorious that, in the Sudan, the Moslem traditionists have an ineradicable tendency to transpose everything into their own mentality. Further, since a manuscript gives a kind of quasi definitiveness to the oral tradition, including all its errors, it becomes almost impossible to eliminate these errors because of the unquestioning respect usually accorded a written document.

*173 There are also the non-literate Moslem traditionists:
814 ordinary dyeli who have been converted in the usual Sudanese
[17] fashion, as described in Chapter 6, and who have abandoned none of the characteristics of their caste. They have merely added a few peculiarities due to Moslem influence.

• 114 In drawing on these sources, European publications add new reasons for doubt. Most especially, because of a desire -- legitimate, in principle -- to bring some sort of order out of the incoherent mass of traditions, but also because of a need to make them fit a personal theory, the European author takes refuge in an hypothesis. Now there is no objection to this, assuming that the hypothesis on which the author bases his theories is clearly stated. Too often, however, the hypothesis is so well concealed or even so intricately entwined in the tradition that it is impossible either to discover what it is or to set an exact limit to its range. This new metamorphosis of tradition is not the least dangerous for historical truth.

115 It is to two non-literate Moslem dyeli that I am indebted
*173 for the traditions concerning the Ségou and Kaarta clans. My interpreter, Soulelman Goundiamou (1), whose services as a

1. Now chief of the village of Ambidédi (Gadiaga).

guide and informant on native matters were invaluable to me, gave

571 with individuals in the same way as individuals deal with
182 each other. They are not only moral persons, as we put it, but they are truly persons, [156] as evidenced by the Blacks' impulsive need for anthropomorphism.

812 Let us note, finally, that a Black does not abstract himself from surrounding nature; nor has he reached the stage of development at which man regards himself as a kind of intermediary between the natural and the supernatural. The Black is an integral part of nature and that is why he treats it like himself. Therefore, natural phenomena are subjected on his behalf to the same kind of ritual sequences as those followed in his own behavior.

Chapter 3

Communities

1. General Considerations

● 114 Native society is not simple, and Europeans studying
631 these countries have used terminology which, not being defined, has obscured reality.

In particular, they have used the terms "kingdom" and "empire" to describe Sudanese states, and both authors and readers have taken these expressions to imply a social organization more or less analogous to those meant by these words in our country.

631 These empires or kingdoms, however, are simply clans, i.e., political groups that have imposed their authority on other groups whose members then become their tributaries, members of a caste, or slaves. Such an empire, if one wishes to use this term, has no exact geographical boundaries or, if one prefers, its boundaries are constantly changing. Furthermore, the country embraced by this term has two parts: territories which may be said to be under direct administration, in which the authority of the clan is directly imposed; and those territories whose position with respect to the ruling clan

596 614 The functions of the "fa." The duties of the fa are many and complex; for the sake of clarity, we shall study them under three headings: cult; relations between communities; administration of property (which will be studied in connection with community property).

596 614 782 Cult. Religion gives considerable strength to the family since nothing is decided without consulting the manes and the gods. Raffenel has given us a picture of old Niany praying to his manes on behalf of his absent son: "O my God, I command my son to your case since he has gone away on a mission important to all of us. Be with him on his journey. Preserve him from the wicked and from all misfortune so that he may once again enter by this door through which he departed and before which I am now kneeling. I implore you, O my God, to restore him to my love and to that of his mother, his brothers and his sisters (1)."

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1. In spite of deviations due to Raffenel's desire to give a personal and literary touch to what he reports, the essential points of this prayer are accurate, and that is why I quote it.

[187] The chronicle of Kaarta tells us that old Sounson begged for early death as a sign that his lineage would be powerful in the future. Also, in order to make a prophecy come true, Deniba Bo submitted to the fatal blows of the Khassonké to make sure that his people would conquer the country!

After all, no one is free of fear of the gods, not even those whom one would take for brave spirits. Raffenel tells us that Bouo, his informant, feared the wrath of the god whose secrets he had revealed. The chronicle of Ségou tells that Ngolo, thinking he had aroused the wrath of his manes by encouraging evil desires in his eldest son, Ntyi, did not hesitate to sacrifice his [179] own grandson, the son of the aforesaid Ntyi, an atrocity which bears witness to a faith that was as profonnd as it was barbarous.

175 of El Hadj Omar, up to April 6, 1890, the day French troops under Lt. Colonel Archinard delivered Ségou from the cruel Moslem occupation.

The Bambara did not long accept the French yoke. To put an end to their plots, the French resident, Captain Underberg, had to execute the king Mari Diara, an act which inspired several local revolts, chiefly in the Sénoufo region. But the new Fama, Bodian, supported by the French, was able to rapidly re-establish peace. Moreover, the destruction of the Toucouleur kingdom of Macina by Colonel Archinard deprived the rebel Bambara of all possibility of outside support. The Ségou kingdom was definitively pacified in 1893.

CHAPTER 6

SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

I. Traditional Structure of Bambara Society

A. Social and Political Organization

182 Traditional Bambara social organization is entirely tied up with religious organization; moreover, the social organization determines the whole economic organization to such an extent that the latter cannot be studied independently.

114 In fact, we still know very little about Bambara social organization. Some good records are available to us in the work of Monteil (1), Aubert and Ortoli (2), Delafosse (3), Labouret (4),

1. Monteil, Les Bambara du Ségou et du Kaarta [The Bambara of Segou and Kaarta].

2. Aubert et Ortoli, Coutumier juridique de l'A.O.F. [French West African Common Law].

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3. Delafosse, Haut-Sénégal et Niger [Upper Senegal and Niger].

4. Labouret, Les Mandingues et leur langue [The Mandingo and Their Language].

etc., but these are still very fragmentary and incomplete. In addi- 177 tion, this society was completely disrupted by the French conquest, either by such radical measures as the suppression of slavery or by a natural evolution as a result of contact with European societies. Nevertheless, traditional structures retain their vitality, despite the effort to adapt them to European formulas.

178 The society seems to have oscillated between familial anarchy and the clan stage, according to alternating ranges of groupings, disassociation, and regroupings.

1. The Family

594 Concerning the Sudanese, Delafosse has already made the
596 distinction between "the restricted family" and the "extended family." The restricted family is composed of the parents and children who live in the "hut." Taken alone, it does not represent a social unit. The true social cell is the extended family. This is the large united family made up of a group of restricted families whose heads recognize a common ancestor. This group, composed of agnates in principle, is the ba-denya, whose members live in huts within an enclosure: gwa or so. The two ends of this [51] enclosure rest on a blõ (vestibule) where the ancestors' altar is found.

601 According to Labouret, the Bambara distinguish three cate-
612 gories of family ties: the paternal line, the maternal line, and relationship by marriage. The child takes the dyamu (honorable name) of his father's group, but the terms applied to ancestors and descendants are the same as those of the maternal line.

"... Kinship includes the following generations: tolo-mina... tolo-sama... tolo-ma-sama: who seizes or pulls ears (a belief has it that if a great grandson pulls the ear of his great [822] grandfather, the latter becomes deaf);

771 the religious system which animates and explains it. The Bambara is an essentially religious being; all his acts are dictated by ritual duties or taboos, and he finds his true liberty only within the rules transmitted to him by tradition. To destroy his religion amounts to destroying his whole social structure as well as his soul. Inversely, every transformation of techniques will have grave repercussions, not only on the material life of the individual, but also on his inner life. In fact, the religion is itself part of a whole cosmological and metaphysical system which explains and orders every existing thing. The simplest and poorest object is a reflection of complex concepts which le[illegible] nothing to chance or to imagination, and we arrive at the paradox that the technical progress and enrichment introduced by the European civilization impoverish the over-all metaphysical representation, while the social evolution ends in detaching the Bambara from his traditional religion and makes of him a rootless being who will be the prey of badly understood ideologies, foreign to his nature and to his genius.

114 771 L. Tauxier (1), pursuing the studies of Father Henry and

1. L. Tauxier, La religion bambara [Bambara Religion].

C. Monteil, has attempted a comprehensive description of Bambara beliefs. But in his exposition Bambara religion appears to be composed of disparate elements with no links between them. This impression is due in large part to the esoteric character of this religion, which certainly contains exoteric elements accessible to all, but whose fundamental principles remain known only to the elders and to the initiated who are reluctant to confide in strangers. The study of Bambara religion has been entirely renewed in these last few years by Mme. Dieterlen (2), who has known how to go beyond the superficial

2. G. Dieterlen, Essai sur la religion bambara [Essay on Bambara Religion].

knowledge we had had of this people. She has introduced us to an admirably cohesive metaphysical system and ritual organization [81] In fact, "the Bambara metaphysic and religion offer a structured whole

771 181 If the Bambara have fought to safeguard their independence, they have done so primarily to preserve their faith and keep their fetishes. They have shown such great attachment for these, that their [101] conquerors have described them as rebels and applied to them the epithet Bamba, synonym of Kafri. These religious struggles in themselves allow us to state as an indisputable fact that before the arrival of the Moslems the Bambara were animistic and sacrificed to genii. /69/

776 811 Did they have an exact and precise idea of their genii as they do now? Apparently yes, for they always reasoned using themselves as a basis of comparison so that in their minds the invisible, impalpable genii to whom they sacrificed had a striking resemblance to man. It is not a man, and yet it is one, they say unable to define their concept or idea, ma si fa do (1).

1. Ma; "man"; si fa' "certain kind"; do; "it is."

776 782 The Moslem word djin translates this idea precisely, and the Bambara use it in everyday language; but when the day of the sacrifice comes, they become unaware of it and there remains only one word -- ma, meaning "man." When they redden with blood the bark of [824] the baobab (Adansonia digitata), the tamarind tree, the false cedar (family of the cedrelaceae), etc., to obtain the good graces and protection of the genie who dwells there, they always confer on it the title ma ("man"), and never that of djiné. "Ma n'zira ba, ma n'tomi ba, ma djala ba; O great baobab man, O great tamarind tree man, O great false-cedar man!" begins the formula used by the sacrificer in offering victims and millet flour to the genie (2). They also have

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2. In /J. Henry/, "Culte des esprits chez les Bambara /Spirit Worship among the Bambara/," Anthropos, Vol. III, No. 4 (1908), p. 1 /p. 702/, note 1, there is an error in translation.

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[194]

Ma n'zira ba, etc., does not mean "great baobab of man." The real meaning is: "O man who is a great baobab." In writing it I prefer a "z" to an "a." Usually the Bambara soften the hard sound by a euphonious little "n." With a hard "s" the word sira cannot be distinguished from the word "tobacco": sira siramougou, "snuff tobacco"; n'ziremougou, "baobab flour."

776 782 a purely Bambara term to express their idea /of these spirits/, and they to the word djiné; they call them gnéna.

776 782 177 798 Before the arrival of the Moslems, the Negro sacrificed to beings to whom they have attributed bodies and souls, although imponderable and invisible, who are intermediate between men and angels and whom the Arabs call الجن el djiné. But they also sacrificed to evil beings, superior to the former in power, whom they call boli. The legend of the boli, an ironic legend which I will tell in full when I discuss this matter, is sufficient proof of this belief. For the Moslems of the Sudan only two things here below /70/ are worthy of attention: Mecca (Makka) and Stamboul -- old Abdul Hamid, Sultan of Constantinople -- who in their eyes, as in the eyes of all Moslems of our colonies, is the great Pope of Islam. Everything that does not bear the stamp of Mecca, everything that does not come from Stamboul, is to be rejected and scorned. Thus the Bambara, fertile in expedients, quickly managed to find a way out of their discussions with the propagators of Islam: "All our boli come from Mecca," was their weapon of war.

776 177 798 The Bambara were pursued from every side, unable to perform publicly even religious ceremonies in honor of simple genii. Can one believe that they added others that were still more terrible? As conquerors the Moslems have always ruthlessly opposed idolatry, destroying its temples and overthrowing its altars. "Believe or die" has always been their motto and always will be as long as they feel